

Ascension Launches Program

Parish to Evaluate Additional Economic Development Sites

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The Ascension Economic Development Corp. is launching a program to help identify sites in the parish that would be good locations for economic development projects.

The AEDC selected CSRS, a Baton Rouge engineering firm, to handle the site evaluation. The plan is to have the company look at a range of unused properties across the parish, then winnow down the best sites for potential development.

“Because of the level of success Ascension Parish has had in attracting economic development projects, we have consumed a lot of the premier economic development sites in the parish,” said Mike Eades, president and CEO of the AEDC. “We’re close to being noncompetitive.”

The evaluation will look at sites in three categories: land in 100-acre-and-up tracts along the Mississippi River corridor that would be ideal for major heavy industry; 25- to 100-acre locations that could serve as the home for free-standing manufacturers or companies that support heavy industry; and 10- to 25-acre plats that could be used for retail or office space.

AEDC will pay CSRS \$40,000 this year to conduct the evaluation. The organization is hopeful it can get some matching money from the Louisiana Economic Development department or the Baton Rouge Area Chamber to cover work on some properties, which could be designated as Louisiana Economic Development Certified Sites.

Certified sites are development-ready industrial locations that have completed a rigorous review process from LED and URS, an independent engineering firm.

Eades said the “cream of the crop” locations could be designated as certified sites. According to LED, there are two certified sites in Ascension Parish: the 987-acre Pointe Sunshine site at La. 18 in Donaldsonville and the 52-acre Donaldsonville Industrial Park site on La. 70.

The evaluation will look at issues crucial to economic development, such as how a property is zoned, the willingness of owners to sell the land, utility service, rail access and if there are wetlands on the site.

“We want to see the feasibility, if a particular piece of land can support economic development,” Eades said.

Right now, Eades said there “really aren’t any” 100-plus-acre sites on the east bank of the Mississippi River identified for industrial development. There is vacant land, but either it isn’t properly zoned or it doesn’t have railroad access.

The situation is the same on the west bank of the river, he said.

In the next six months, the goal is for CSRS to identify 20 to 25 sites that would be ripe for development.

“Two years down the road, hopefully we’ll have some of them sold,” Eades said. “We’re trying to ensure we have got products on the market to take advantage of the assets in Ascension Parish.”

Iain Vasey, BRAC’s executive director of business development, said companies are looking for quick turnarounds when they look at a location as a potential site for a manufacturing plant. They want to know in a week or less if there are any issues with a property.

“If you’re not doing your homework on a site, you’re not getting a look at deals,” he said.

The AEDC program and BRAC’s push toward getting more sites certified by LED is all about making sure landowners get as many people as possible looking at their properties, Vasey said.

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